



YoungStar

Frequently Asked Questions: Overview of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

September 30, 2016

Note: Almost all questions have been revised since June 10, 2013; questions that have been substantially revised or added since the last update are highlighted.

YoungStar is a 5 Star quality rating and improvement system that supports child care and school-age care providers in the areas of education, learning environment & curriculum, business & professional practices and the health & well-being of children. Through this rating system the state addresses several key issues in Wisconsin's child care system. YoungStar:

- Focuses on improving outcomes for children by improving the overall quality of care
- Creates multiple pathways to professional development opportunities and better quality for child care and school-age programs
- Creates a clear, understandable tool for parents to choose quality child care
- Creates incentives and provides support for programs to improve services, particularly for low-income children
- Improves accountability for the Wisconsin Shares system

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Answers: Overview of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

OVR-1. What is quality in an early childhood setting, and why does quality matter?

There is much research that defines quality in early childhood settings and tells us that quality matters a great deal. Here are just two excerpts from this research, but you can find many others:

Research typically points to two dimensions of quality: structural features and process features. The structural elements of a child care environment establish the foundation for optimal process conditions. Structural features refer to the way in which the program is organized such as staff-to-child ratio and teacher qualifications. Process quality refers to the experiences children have in child care and include such aspects as adult–child interactions, children’s exposure to and involvement with learning materials, and parent– caregiver relationships. These are critical components that directly affect children’s behavior and learning experiences in the child-care setting. The most important process element in quality child care is the human relationships between the teaching staff and children and their families (Uttal, 2002).

Excerpt from Families, Schools, and Communities: Building Partnerships for Educating Children, by C. Barbour & N. H. Barbour & P.A. Scully, 2008 edition, pp. 130-134.

Research confirms that improving quality is the right thing to do to improve child outcomes. Children who participate in higher quality early childhood education programs demonstrate higher school readiness, lower subsequent participation in special education, less criminal activity, higher high school graduation rates, and higher lifetime wages.

In terms of children’s everyday experiences, children appear happier and more cognitively engaged in settings in which caregivers are interacting with them positively and in settings in which child:adult ratios are lower. There also is evidence of concurrent relations between child care quality and children’s performance in other settings. Children who attend higher-quality child care settings (measured by caregiver behaviors, by physical facilities, by age-appropriate activities, and by structural and caregiver characteristics) display better cognitive, language, and social competencies on standardized tests and according to parents, teachers, and observers. Finally, there is evidence that child care quality is related to children’s subsequent competencies. The relationship is more evident when cumulative measures of child care quality are analyzed, rather than one-time assessments....

Excerpt from Child Care Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need to be Improved? Deborah Lowe Vandell and Barbara Wolfe, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 5/24/00, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/ccqual.htm>.

OVR-2. What is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and what does it accomplish?

A QRIS is a method to observe, assess, rate, and improve the quality of child care programming and to communicate the level of child care quality to parents and families as they choose early care and education settings. A QRIS defines quality indicators and provides a framework of accountability for child care programming. Networks and collaborations are made available to child care providers to provide support and technical assistance, including mentoring and coaching, to help programs increase and sustain quality efforts.

YoungStar is a QRIS that includes four key components:

- Training and technical assistance
- Child care observation and rating
- YoungStar Quality Adjustments based on ratings
- Communication to parents regarding the rating system and the importance of quality early education

YoungStar drives quality improvement in child care throughout the state of Wisconsin by supporting providers who want to improve the quality of their care, by creating financial incentives to deliver better services to children, and by giving parents meaningful information to select child care for their children. YoungStar supports ongoing child care quality improvement by linking higher quality care to higher Wisconsin Shares payments, and it helps prevent fraud in the Wisconsin Shares program.

Examples of other states that have achieved enhanced program quality, and thus improved outcomes for children as a result of QRIS, include the states of Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and North Carolina. Specifically, Oklahoma demonstrated improvements in the quality of their subsidized child care program, and Missouri's 2009 study showed improvement in children's social-emotional and early literacy skills. The QRIS National Learning Network has catalogued more detail on the success of QRIS efforts at <http://qrisnetwork.org>.

In Wisconsin, we have heard from numerous providers who want to share the benefits they have found in YoungStar:

- A cohesive, evidence-based structure for quality improvement
- Support, excitement, and encouragement from Technical Consultants and YoungStar staff
- A vehicle to talk with staff, families, and community members about the importance of our work and the quality improvement process
- Financial support
- Pride in our work
- Affirmation of program quality
- And, most important of all—positive child outcomes!

OVR-3. What was the legislative process to pass YoungStar?

YoungStar was approved by the Joint Committee on Finance on June 23, 2010. [Motion 38](#) details how YoungStar was to be implemented, including immediate training and technical assistance opportunities that the Department of Children and Families (DCF or Department) offered in Fall 2010. The department submitted a [five year plan](#) on November 22, 2010, that formally requested transfer of resources for full operation of the YoungStar Program, and on December 14, 2010, the Joint Committee on Finance approved this plan.

A consortium (the YoungStar Consortium) comprised of Supporting Families Together Association, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, and Celebrate Children Foundation was selected to administer the YoungStar contract in the eleven local YoungStar offices. Information on local YoungStar offices can be found at <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/localoffice.htm>. A contract was signed on November 1, 2010.

On June 30th, 2011 the 2011-2013 State Biennial Budget went into effect. This Act modified timelines for implementation of YoungStar to the following:

- Spring 2012: School-age programs are included in YoungStar.
- July 2012: Wisconsin Shares tiered reimbursement begins.

Detailed information about the state's financial support of YoungStar is provided in the YoungStar Proposal DCF submitted to the [Joint Finance Committee](#) of the legislature.

OVR-4. How does YoungStar work?

Step A: Providers Apply. Providers who want to participate in YoungStar do so by filling out a YoungStar Contract. Providers who have never participated in YoungStar before complete the YoungStar Contract available on the **Providers** section of the YoungStar web site:

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/providers.htm>

A program that has previously participated in YoungStar will be mailed a YoungStar Contract Renewal every two years, approximately 4 months before the program's Anniversary month. For more information on YoungStar renewal, see:

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/renewal.htm>

Step-by-step instructions for filling out the YoungStar Contract are also available on the **Providers** web page. These instructions will help providers decide if they want someone to come into their programs to work on quality initiatives. If a provider wants personal help in deciding which rating to choose, the local YoungStar offices can help.

When a provider has completed the YoungStar Contract, s/he sends the YoungStar Contract to the local YoungStar office. You may find your local YoungStar office at:

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/program/localoffice>

A Note about Rating: Providers can accumulate points in a number of different categories to earn a YoungStar rating. There are minimum amounts of points that providers must earn in one star level before moving to the next. Providers can use the following documents to help learn about which points are available to them and what minimum point requirements must be met before moving from one star level to the next:

YoungStar Point Details:

Group: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-group-2016.pdf>

Family: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-family-2016.pdf>

School-Age: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-schoolage-2016.pdf>

Day Camps: [files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-daycamp-2016.pdf](http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-daycamp-2016.pdf)

YoungStar Minimum Point Requirements:

http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/minimum_points_required.pdf

Step B: Local YoungStar Offices Process Applications. When the local YoungStar office receives the YoungStar Contract, the office will contact the provider to let the provider know that the forms have been received.

If a provider requested to have an Automated Rating (s/he does not want someone to come into her/his program) the local YoungStar office will enter this information into the YoungStar case management system, and a rating will be generated.

If the provider requested Technical Assistance to help prepare for a Technical or Formal Rating, the local YoungStar office will contact the provider to set up her or his first Technical Assistance visit as outlined in Step C below.

Below are the YoungStar Evaluation Criteria used to rate providers:

Family:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-family.pdf

Group:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-group.pdf

School-Age:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-schoolage.pdf

Day Camps:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-daycamp.pdf

Step C: Technical Assistance Is Given to Providers. If a provider has requested Technical Assistance, then within four (4) weeks of receiving the completed application forms, staff from the local YoungStar office will contact the provider and set up the first Technical Assistance visit with the provider.

At that first visit, the Technical Consultant will come to the program and, in partnership with the program Director/Site Supervisor/Family Provider, identify opportunities for quality improvement. The Technical Consultant will then work with the provider to make a plan for using the time they have together and follow through on these plans over the course of sixteen (16) weeks. During this time, the provider, in partnership with the Technical Consultant, will decide what the provider's micro-grant will be used for based on the goals identified in the Quality Improvement Plan. After the provider has received the desired Technical Assistance, the program will then complete a Technical Rating or a Formal Rating with Observation.

Step D: Provider Is Rated. The rating will happen in one of two ways:

1. If the provider has chosen a **Technical Rating**, after any requested Technical Assistance has been provided, the Technical Consultant will verify and/or observe information within the Evaluation Criteria from the provider and enter that information into the YoungStar automated system. Then, a Technical Rating will be generated for the provider based upon the information the Technical Consultant entered, along with the provider's verified education and training information received from The Registry.

The Technical Consultant will then review the Technical Rating results with the provider, and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) will post the Technical Rating on the YoungStar web site.

OR

2. If a provider is eligible for, and has chosen a **Formal Rating with Observation**, after any requested Technical Assistance has been provided, the provider will complete a Formal Rating with Observation Request form and send it to the local YoungStar office. The Technical Consultant will then verify and/or observe information within the Evaluation Criteria from the provider and enter that information into the YoungStar automated system. Within eight (8) weeks of the completion of the Evaluation Criteria portion of the rating, an ERS Observer will make an unannounced visit to the program to complete all required ERS observations.

The ERS Observer and Technical Consultant will then review the Formal Rating results with the provider, and DCF will post the Formal Rating on the YoungStar web site.

OVR-5. Who can participate in YoungStar, and who must participate in YoungStar?

Mandatory Participation: Programs that currently serve children who receive Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy *must* participate in YoungStar.

Voluntary Participation: Sometimes a program happens to have no children enrolled who receive Wisconsin Shares. These programs may *volunteer* to be rated through YoungStar, as long as they agree to accept any children utilizing Wisconsin Shares in the future.

OVR-6. How do programs accumulate points?

The *YoungStar Quality Indicator Points Detail* documents describe the multiple ways programs can accumulate points. YoungStar has established minimum point requirements in each of four areas (educational qualifications of the Lead Teacher/Group Leader and the Director/Site Supervisor/Family Provider, learning environment and curriculum, business and professional practices, and child health and well-being) to ensure that programs have a balanced approach to quality and are making improvements in all areas of programming, not just in one or two areas.

There are two types of points:

- Those that are *required* to earn certain star levels
- Those that are *optional* and add to the overall point total

The *Points Detail* documents give the *required* minimum points for 3, 4, and 5 Star ratings in each of the four categories. The *Points Detail* also lists many *optional* quality indicators programs can choose from to earn additional points in those areas.

Points Detail documents are available here:

Family: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-family-2016.pdf>

Group: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-group-2016.pdf>

School-Age: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-schoolage-2016.pdf>

Day Camps: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youngstar/pdf/point-detail/2016-point-detail/point-detail-daycamp-2016.pdf>

OVR-7. What areas of a program are rated?

The criteria that programs must meet to earn certain star levels are research-based indicators linked to quality and include:

- Lead Teacher/Group Leader and Director/Site Supervisor/Family Provider Educational Qualifications
- Learning Environment & Curriculum
- Business & Professional Practices – including business practices, staff benefits, and family involvement
- Child Health and Well-Being

Learn more about these criteria in the *Points Detail* documents listed above or in the comprehensive *Evaluation Criteria* documents:

Family:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-family.pdf

Group:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-group.pdf

School-Age:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-schoolage.pdf

Day Camps:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-daycamp.pdf

OVR-8. How do years of experience get counted in the YoungStar system?

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL). Providers may earn YoungStar points by contacting the technical college, university, or private college system to determine if their personal life experiences can equate to college credit through the completion of a process called *Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)* that demonstrates competencies already met. Most Wisconsin child care providers have several years of relevant experience and many hours of noncredit-based training that can often address competencies developed in college courses. This means that, even if you have not completed college credits, you may have learned and mastered many of the skills and concepts as those who have. Sometimes this learning-through-experience can be "counted" towards college credit through the CPL process.

For more information on CPL, check out the following resources:

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) *Credit for Prior Learning* webpage:

<http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/teach/CPL/>

A description of the CPL course offered within the Wisconsin Technical College System:

<http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/assets/Documents/CPL-Course-Description.pdf>

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Wisconsin scholarships can help finance CPL and can help individuals complete further professional credit-based training:

<http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/teach/>

The free WECA Professional Development Counseling Service can help you explore CPL and other professional development options:

<http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/programs/youngstar/PDcounseling/>

(Or call WECA at 1.800.783.9322, and select Option 3 when prompted.)

Pathways to Early Childhood Higher Education: Credit for Prior Learning describes how CPL can document experience and noncredit-based training and can be a pathway to higher education:

http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/credit_for_prior_learning_brief.pdf

Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). YoungStar awards points to providers with a CDA, which is an experience- and competency- based credential in child development. Years of experience and training received in a non-credit and/or informal format are also valuable to child care teachers, directors, and family child care providers as they establish their learning environments and professional practices. The ability of a child care professional to put into practice the competencies gained through direct teaching experiences and informal training received can result in points earned in the quality indicator areas of early learning environment and professional practices. You can learn more about the CDA at:

<http://www.cdacouncil.org/>

OVR-9. Do part-day programs receive YoungStar points in the same way points are calculated for full-day programs?

Yes. Activities and benchmarks outlined in YoungStar, such as 60 minutes of physical activity, can be prorated to fit a shorter day schedule.

If providers choose a Technical Rating or a Formal Rating with Observation, on-site observations are completed at all child care and school-age programs, including programs that have part-day preschool programs. However, any classrooms or times of the day that are paid for with public school 3K, 4K, or 5K funds are *not* observed, and the education of the teachers who teach *solely* in those classrooms/hours (and in no other classrooms/hours in the child care/school-age program) *cannot* be counted for YoungStar points.

OVR-10. If I am a Director/Site Supervisor of more than one center/program, is each center/program rated separately?

Yes, multi-sites programs with individual licenses receive independent ratings. However, if you are the Director/Site Supervisor for more than one site, your educational qualifications can only count toward points for one center/program.

OVR-11. Does being licensed vs. certified increase your score?

No. You receive at least a 2 Star rating if you are in full compliance with licensing and/or certification rules. That is the floor. Being licensed does not increase your points.

However, current Wisconsin Shares reimbursement levels are different for certified providers and licensed programs. YoungStar micro-grants are also different for certified providers and licensed programs.

OVR-12. How are programs notified of points earned and star level awarded?

If a provider chooses an Automated Rating (and is in regulatory compliance), s/he is awarded a 2 Star rating, and s/he is sent the rating certificate and star level window cling in the mail.

If a provider chooses to have a Technical Rating or a Formal Rating with Observation, a Technical Consultant or Rating Observer contacts the provider to explain the rating awarded. The provider also receives a certificate and window cling in the mail six-eight weeks after s/he is awarded the star rating.

All ratings are published on the Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search website at:

<http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/BasicSearch.aspx>

For providers who choose a Technical Rating or a Formal Rating with Observation, the star rating is not published until the Technical Consultant or Rating Observer contacts the provider and explains the final rating.

OVR-13. How do I get YoungStar updates?

YoungStar now has an e-mail subscription list to communicate to child care and school-age providers on topics related to YoungStar and quality improvement. If you would like to subscribe to this list, please provide your e-mail address at:

<http://dcf.wi.gov/ysemail>

Of course, you may continue to check out the YoungStar homepage (<http://dcf.wi.gov/youngstar/>) and the YoungStar page for providers (<http://dcf.wi.gov/youngstar/providers.htm>).

OVR-14. What do I do if I have a question, idea, or suggestion?

You may contact YoungStar staff at 800.362.7353 or youngstar@wisconsin.gov.